

One-Track Enhancement

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Within the debate on neuroenhancement, cognitive and moral enhancements have been discussed as two different kinds of improvements achievable by different biomedical means. Pharmacological means that improve memory, attention, decision-making, or wakefulness are considered cognitive enhancers, while attempts to improve altruism, empathy, or diminish aggression are categorized as moral enhancements. Persson and Savulescu (2008; 2012), establish the need for two types of enhancement when they characterize commonsense morality as a set of static psychological predispositions to react in particular ways that are unaffected by improvements in cognition [1,2]. They argue, scientific progress, fueled by the use of cognitive enhancers, will outpace our natural abilities to be moral. I challenge the characterization of commonsense morality as a static set of psychological predispositions. To argue that cognitive enhancement might lead to improvements both in science and in commonsense morality, I will propose that commonsense morality is best characterized as a folk theory with features similar to a scientific theory. To describe commonsense morality as a folk theory, I will utilize some established views about commonsense psychology [3] and then apply them to commonsense morality. I will propose that commonsense morality is a tacitly endorsed theory, i.e., a folk morality (FM), which introduces abstract entities to explain observable behavior. I will argue further that the boundaries of FM, could be drawn by collecting generally accepted moral statements that feature moral concepts. I will show that like a scientific theory, FM could be revised and in principle replaced by a better theory, which will result in better moral attitudes and judgments. Redefining commonsense morality as a revisable folk theory, I conclude, would remove the need for two separate tracks of enhancement because if improvements in cognition promote progress for scientific theories, they would have those same effects on our abilities to generate moral theories.

[1] Persson, I. & Savulescu, J. (2008). The Perils of Cognitive Enhancement and the Urgent Imperative to Enhance the Moral Character of Humanity. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 25(3): 162-177

[2] Persson, I. & Savulescu, J. (2012). *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*. Oxford University Press.

[3] Churchland, P. M. (1992). *A neurocomputational perspective: The nature of mind and the structure of science*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.